

Curating a New World of Publishing

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Curating a New World of Publishing

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The following is a transcription of a live presentation at the 2012 Charleston Conference on November 8, 2012. Video and a link to slides for the session are available on the Charleston Conference website at http://katina.info/conference/video_2012_curating.php.

Mitchell Davis: Thank you very much, and thank you guys for coming. I think this is going to be a very interesting session. I want to thank Glenda Alvin. She was the real inspiration for this session, and Katina kind of called me in and asked if I could help flesh it out, so I wanted to thank her. I also want to thank Eric for getting us PowerPoint slides in the midst of Sandy and no power; we've heard a lot of stories like that this week of people still remaining committed to the Conference and still making it here under tough circumstances.

So basically the premise for this is that obviously, in the last 5 to 10 years, a lot of different ways have emerged to publish books from independent publishing platforms, self-publishing companies, things like that. Also, there's tons of academic content, open access content, and things that are published that are just off the radar screen of the primary, maybe the bigger distributors, the approval plans, the ways that libraries have set up to easily acquire books. And so I think that the Charleston Conference thought that it would be an interesting session to invite some different folks that represent different parts of that world and let them first tell you a little bit about what they do and how they publish, but also how they think about libraries acquiring their materials. I think the bigger question is, with all of this abundance, is there a place that libraries can play, and have good works bubble up to the top of that output, and make sure that libraries can acquire those materials. So that's the basic premise.

Each of these guys is going to come up and give a run-through of what they do (referring to slide),

"Increased publishing output, how does it affect the libraries, is there a self-publishing stigma in the library world, even as more authors and scholars publish this way?" I think it's very interesting, some of the things Rush is going to talk about as far as how the open access world approaches some of this and uses peer review to sort of let things bubble to the top. How do you guys make sense of these big numbers and these big catalogs and ensure that you can find the right things, and can libraries actually add value to this process? So I'm going to go ahead and let Mark take over from here, and he can tell you a little bit about what he does. He is doing some very interesting things in the public library distribution space with some of his independently published content, and he's going to talk a little bit about that and about Smashwords in general. Thanks.

Mark Coker: Thank you, Mitchell. Hello, everyone. It's great to be here. I'm going to go through a lot of slides really quickly. So the old model of publishing, of traditional publishing, was really predicated upon scarcity. Publishers controlled the printing press. They controlled the access to retail distribution and library distribution, and they controlled the knowledge to publish. Authors and readers were shut out of this process. So I think the dirty little secret of traditional publishing is that publishers aren't really in the business of publishing books; they are in the business of selling books, and there is a difference. So publishing decisions are based on perceived commercial merit. They're looking for books to acquire that they think they can sell. Publishers guessed what books readers wanted to read, and, as a result, they rejected a lot of other books. They decided what writers could publish, they decided what readers could read, and what libraries could buy. I think e-book self-publishing overcomes many of these limitations of traditional

publishing, and I think e-book self-publishing better aligns with the interests of libraries, patrons, and authors.

Patrons want maximum accessibility, discovery, diversity; they want great books. Authors, the new publishers, the publishers of the future, want the same things. They want availability, discoverability, and they want readership. Libraries are in the business of promoting a culture of reading; making books accessible to anyone, and libraries deliver readership. So I want you to prepare for an unimaginable flood of content, and with this flood will come incredible diversity and abundance. The tools for self-publishing are now free and available to everyone around the world. Any writer anywhere in the world can instantly self-publish a book and make the book available to major retailers and libraries. So the printing press is now free and available; it's in the cloud. This is what we do at Smashwords. We also distribute books to retailers, to the major e-book retailers, and libraries, and we help disseminate the professional best practices required for professional publishing.

One hundred thousand: this is the number of books that Smashwords will release this year. We're going to publish about 9,000 books in the next 30 days. These are books that readers want to read. All of our books are hitting bestseller lists at major retailers. Our books are hitting the *New York Times* Bestseller list, and since you're in the business of connecting readers with books they want to read, you need to take a look at self-published books. This is how Smashwords has grown over the last few years.

So how do you curate this flood? I would encourage you to get involved at the beginning. Libraries are great at promoting a culture of reading; now I want you to promote a culture of authorship. You have an opportunity to help the next generation of writers and authors become professional publishers. Facilitate community publishing. Facilitate community around publishing. Connect your local writers with local readers. Hold workshops with local, self-published authors who could then train and mentor the next generation of authors. Give your patrons the ability to publish to the library. This is something

that we're working on; we've got some pilots going with some public libraries around the country.

For your collection, emulate the best practices of the major e-book retailers. They've been doing this for a few years. In the old world of publishing, often libraries were carrying books that retailers didn't want to carry; books that were never read. Today, it's flipped around a little bit: Major retailers are carrying everything. They have unlimited shelf space, they can carry everything; and they are surfacing data about what books are in demand by readers. So I think the new model for curation for libraries is to maximize the selection and diversity of your catalog and recognize that readers are the new curators. You want to tap into the wisdom of the masses. Take advantage of retail sales data to identify books that should be in your collection, books that should be surfaced, books that should be promoted. Adopt patron-driven acquisition models where you can expose the entire catalog of all available books and let readers decide what they want to read.

Self-published books are available to you today; you can work with most of the major library aggregators: Baker & Taylor, 3M, OverDrive. These books are now available from them, and we just recently launched an interesting service called Smashwords Library Direct, where you can establish large open collections. We're working with folks who are going to be acquiring, you know, our top 10,000 best-selling titles, 50,000 best-selling titles. And these books are cheap. Self-published e-books on average are around three dollars apiece, and there are tens of thousands of free books. So that's it. Thank you.

Mitchell Davis: Thanks, that was good. So next is Eric Hellman from Unglue.it. This is a crowd sourcing platform for publishing. Go ahead, go for it.

Eric Hellman: Hi, I'm Eric Hellman, and I'd like to talk to you a little bit about Unglue.it and a public sector for books. So having worked in the library technology business for the past 15 years or so I've become aware of the importance of libraries in creating a public sector for books. Now, libraries are this magic system that convert

physical objects into a public good. Books are sold in bookstores, and by magically enabling lending, libraries convert these commercial objects into things that benefit everyone and everyone can read for free. Now, when books become digital, it doesn't work so well, because an efficient library will be competing directly with the commercial channel. So while we can pretend that e-books are just like print books, it sort of leads to libraries becoming providers of inconvenience, and that kind of sucks.

So we need to build a new public sector for digital books. All right, so a lot of people are working towards building that public sector, and I just put a few of the components that people are working on. The archetype for this is Project Gutenberg. I mean, the best works of our civilization belong to all of us and are available free from Project Gutenberg as e-books, but there are a lot of pieces. There are some pieces missing. One thing that's missing is a good way to take books that are in copyright and move them into this public sector. So for that we need a new model, and we asked our friend Big Bird for a model. It's a little-known fact that Big Bird moonlights as a children's librarian. So let's look at the funding model for public radio. Unlike what was implied by Mitt Romney, the public radio and public broadcasting receives a very small percentage of its total funding from the government. More of its funding comes from "listeners like you," and foundations, and businesses, and things like that. So the comparison between e-books and public radio for example, is that it's expensive. It's expensive to rent a radio station, and it's expensive to develop programming. But if you can raise that fixed cost, it doesn't cost you anything to serve an additional listener. So if you can figure out, cobble together enough money to meet your fixed costs, you can make the signal free, and that is cool.

So we mapped that model onto e-books. The Unglue.it funding model relies, first of all, on library distribution, because with libraries involved you can distribute these books at zero marginal cost. It still costs a lot to make a good e-book; it could involve a year of an author's life, for example. So there's still a big fixed cost. But if we can figure out a way to make that fixed cost

available and provide some profit to the publisher, then we can afford to give those books away for free to everybody, everywhere; and that's a thing that, if it's possible to do, for even a small number of books, we should do it. So the model is to run a pledge drive for every book that is being offered by a rights holder, and that is what the Unglue.it platform does. The URL is unglue.it, and the way we raised the funds is through crowd funding just like Kickstarter has been doing.

So let me tell you how it works. This is our one success so far; we launched in May: *Oral Literature in Africa*. It was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1970. It is a classic in its field. It essentially created the field, the scholarly field, of oral literature. But it's been out-of-print for many years. The rights reverted to the author, and it's not available to current scholars, especially those scholars in Africa who are doing the cutting edge research on oral literature in Africa. So the rights holder sets a target; in this case, Ruth Finnegan, the author, wanted to make it available. She found a publisher willing to help her do it, Open Book Publishers in Cambridge, UK, and they linked up with us and we ran a campaign for it. So we made the campaign page. It's a description of the book. Chances for people to comment on it and people who think that the book is worthy of being a public book that's free to everybody, worthy of their support, they can contribute to the campaign. When the campaign is successful, what we do is we issue an Unglued edition with a Creative Commons License and make it available for download from Internet Archive and anywhere else that wants to distribute it.

So the status of Unglue.it is that we launched on May 17 of this year. We started out with five campaigns, and one of the campaigns took off and succeeded in one month later, that was oral literature in Africa. We raised \$7,500.00 from 257 individuals and two libraries. We were shut down by Amazon Payments on August 9, because they didn't want to do crowd funding, but that is totally another talk. We released the first Unglued e-book on September 17th, and we re-launched with a new payment provider on October 15th.

So let me talk just briefly about what books we're doing. Well, first of all we don't see ourselves as a publisher, and we don't see ourselves as a gatekeeper. We don't finance unwritten books, because we'd have to deliver an e-book within 90 days of a campaign success. What our role is is to make sure that the rights holder really has the rights and can deliver those rights and, you know, make everything legal, and that they can produce an e-book file of good technical quality.

A few words about Creative Commons Licensing. First of all the rights holder retains the copyright. We're not buying copyrights. The licenses are format neutral which means that licensees can shift formats. They are global. We're not in the business of doing U.S.-only books, for example, and anyone can distribute these books. Libraries can distribute them. Google can distribute them, etc. Creative Commons Licensing does not allow DRM, so that is kind of an issue and has proven to be a temporary issue, at least, in getting any of the library e-book vendors to support it, not that they don't want to, and there are different options.

So this is one of our new campaigns after launch, "So You Want to be a Librarian?" It is a good example of a book that people who might want to read it might not have the money to invest in the book, and people in the library field, you know, would want this book to be available to everybody. So now it's your turn, you can download this book, you can give it away, you can index it, you can remix it, you can preserve it, etc.

In conclusion, this is going to take a lot of work to make it happen, and if you sit around watching it, it won't happen. But if you want it to happen, it will happen. It's going to work. So thank you.

Mitchell Davis: That was great, and our next speaker is Rush Miller, and he is going to tell you what he is doing in the academic digital publishing world.

Rush Miller: I want to talk about a little different aspect of all this, and that is how libraries can become publishers. We at the University of Pittsburgh have become a publisher, officially a publisher, I should say, and I guess the first

question is why do you want to do that? And I think there are many sides to why we do this, but I have been a Library Director 37 years, I think, and I've been dealing with journal inflation and commercial publishers the whole time; and I'm tired of it, and I want to help change it. We in libraries have talked about how we could develop a better system, or we should develop a system, or university should take ownership, and develop a better way to distribute the research that is produced at our campuses and then sold back to us. Well, here are some of the ways that I think we can make a difference in this. It incentivizes; we started out to incentivize open access. We are very firm believers at the University of Pittsburgh in the open access model, and we have been in a reallocation mode, like most of us have, for so long that we've reallocated a huge amount of resources into publishing as a library, and it has had amazing results, almost some of them accidental, really.

Our goal strategically, this is actually in our strategic plan, is to support scholars in knowledge production, but dissemination and access, particularly open access to their work, we want to build collaborations, continue to build collaborations all around the world. We have partners around the world in this effort, and we want to improve the efficiency of scholarly communication and support innovation in it. And of course we want to establish trusted environments just as the traditional publishers have done in this space.

We started out collaborating with the University of Pittsburgh Press. They're an official partner of ours in the journal publishing, but they contribute nothing to it. So, you know, that may be a better way of saying it. Our Press is not a journal publisher; we try to say "now you are," but they really don't have the resources to help with this. We did however, several years ago, digitize and make available all of their backlists, I think it's 750 or 760 titles in something, called the *University of Pittsburgh Press Digital Editions*. Some of those were interesting; we just gave them away, all the backlists, and some of those books actually were rediscovered this way and now are selling in the print-on-demand at actually pretty good clips. So

they actually have made money from providing free access to their backlists, although the press world was a little taken aback, I think, when we did it.

We are a publisher of repositories. You see here from 2001 to 2010, we've opened six or seven different subject-based repositories. Our institutional repository opened in '09; it has about 12 or 15,000 things in it now. We are a mandate ETD site, so we have 5,000 ETDs, but we also have the world's greatest transplant surgeon, Tom Starzl, published 2,300 journal articles. Every one of them is in our repository, even Lancet articles and these others. But we got into e-journals because the OJS platform looked to be something that we could manage on our campus in our library environment and make available to Pitt-based journals as a service. Because a lot of these journals, not just at our university, but around the country, are being published in print only; they are small, and they are, in fact, declining in subscriptions, and they are now officially at-risk. So we are targeting at-risk journals that we were associated with to move them into the electronic space, because they weren't going to get there on their own at all. They didn't even understand why they were losing subscriptions so dramatically. So we put this platform up and went around to all the editors on our campus who had journals, and there were a couple dozen of those actually, and most of them did this. Why? They did this, because it gave them an online environment. If they wanted to move to open access, we helped them do that. If they wanted a subscription we did that too as an electronic journal, and, you know, we didn't charge for it. So we were a free service to these editors. Well that's the best deal they'd ever heard of, so they did it.

So now we made a press release and said, "We're doing this, and we have 'X' number of journals, and we'll do it for anyone in the world. If you move a journal to open access, you can come to us. We'll put you on our platform. We'll help train you. I have staff of graphic designers; we'll design a beautiful website and so forth." Oh, the phone started ringing immediately, so we suddenly found ourselves a world publisher almost without realizing we would become that. We have one

based in India, one based in Indonesia, all over the world, actually. So our goals are to propel the scholarship at University of Pittsburgh forward, but also to extend that service beyond our University and to save journals and incentivize open access, and that's our primary goal, I think.

We also work very hard to make sure that, as a publisher, now we have an imprint; and as a publisher, everything that has that imprint on it meets rigorous peer review and quality control, so we absolutely—although the journal editors are all around the world, all over the country—we have an advisory board that actually approves their being associated with us, and that's a national advisory boards of scholars, so we don't take this role lightly as a gatekeeper. We make sure there is a rigorous peer review, and we make them all be open access unless they are a Pitt-based journal. As I mentioned the advisory board, I won't go into that, we use Commons Licensing as well.

There is one journal that we have that is kind of an interesting new approach to peer review, and that is sort of a dual peer-review system; an open system at one side, and a traditional system at the same time. You can see here in this slide they throw it out for comment before they publish it and get public comment on the article or the manuscript, but at the same time they're running it through a traditional peer review system, and at the end they publish these public comments, they publish these peer reviews of the article as they publish it. Something of a different way to approach this. I think there is going to be a lot of experimentation around this in the future.

How do we sustain this? Well we realized very quickly that we were going beyond what we had budgeted, you know, so we have started charging. We give a base service free to anyone, and then we charge for enhanced services, like training the editorial board, training the editor on how to be an editor and how to use the software, and doing graphic design work, and etc. We do print-on-demand for issues that they need to have some print issues of, and most do not do that. We absorbed something called the Scholarly Exchange at Harvard. Julian Fisher's platform that he had a large number of journals on without any services

really; and we absorbed that recently when he wanted to give it up. That added 40 more journals to our array, although we only just host them. Only a few of them did we bring into the publishing program as a publisher.

Now we are moving into monograph publishing. We've been up here talking about e-books. Well, this platform is being developed by the Public Knowledge Project. We are a development partner of theirs in all of this, and we are now moving to publish monographic literature on their platform as part of what we do. We have one book already published on it, and I don't have time to tell you about this book, but it is going to be a very interesting book. And then a book very much, Eric was talking about, Dan Russell wrote a book that is now out-of-print, and the rights were his, and so we have republished it as a revised edition as an open access e-book on this platform, and others will be coming along.

So, you know, how does the press figure into this? It's a topic for another time. You can see me afterwards. But, you know, we think we are becoming a press. We have a university press. It's

going to be interesting to see the dynamic; they are more conservative than we are, of course. We are also a founding member of the Coalition for Library Publishing. We are a member of COPE. We have a fund; I set up a fund for paying authors fees for open access to try to put money where our mouths are. We mandate open access at Pitt now. So we pay when grants aren't available if it's purely open access publishing, we actually pay those fees for authors, and that was a tough decision to come to. We don't even know what it is going to cost us; we have no way to gauge it. So we don't have a limit on that account yet. By the way, it's coming out of the book budget, if you really want to know. We're the first library member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers' Associations. So we're taking this role very seriously, and we believe that a library, a research library, ought to be involved in publishing now. Not just, we ought to be less passive about this, we ought to really get engaged in developing the new models for scholarly dissemination in the new digital age and not leave it to publishers and just react to the publishers as they do these things, not the way we want them to do it most of the time. So that's all I have to say. Thank you.